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AGRICULTURAL MANPOWER SITUATION IN THE NORTHEAST

By

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A statement of the manpower situation, appraisal of the labor resources, and the nature and scope of the problem of recruiting and training additional farm laborers for year-around and seasonal work. Other members of the Bureau staff in the Northeast Region assisted in the preparation of this report.

APPENDIX
III

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Farm labor is the number one problem in the agriculture of the Northeast. It crops up everywhere, in the conversations of farmers, in the speeches of agricultural leaders, in newspaper reports, magazine articles, and in surveys and studies by State agricultural colleges and the United States Department of Agriculture, and at times even in the discussions of city folk. Food shortages, machinery and equipment rationing, or farm-to-market transportation can hardly be mentioned without farm labor appearing somewhere in the discussion.

General Considerations

This report attempts to summarize important facts about the farm labor situation in the Northeast and indicate probable trends and possible adjustments for 1943.

(1) The total number of persons working on farms in the Northeast in 1942 was greater than in 1941. This is because more people entered than left farm employment. The majority of the 134,000 family and regular hired workers estimated to have left farm employment in New England and the Middle Atlantic States (New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) between September 1941 and September 1942, entered non-farm employment. Of those accepting nonfarm work, one-fifth continued to live on the farm. About one-quarter to one-third entered the armed forces. Other workers will leave farms in 1943. These will consist of (a) full and part-time hired or family workers who leave farm work for full-time industrial jobs, (b) farmers who retire because they think now is a good time to sell their farms and equipment, or who quit because of difficulties in getting labor, machinery, and other supplies, and (c) men who are drafted into the armed forces. The deferment of essential agricultural workers and the exclusion from the draft of men 38 years of age and over will help reduce the number of farm workers leaving to enter the armed forces or nonfarm employment in 1943. The vacancies caused by men leaving farm employment will have to be filled by older men, women, and youth of school age from farm and non-farm sources.

(2) The early part of 1942 was characterized by much concern among farmers as to whether they would be able to hire sufficient labor, particularly during the harvest season. As the season progressed,

however, they became more confident of getting labor to harvest the crops and take care of the livestock. Practically all the production goals of 1942 were met. The beginning of 1943 finds farmers again apprehensive with respect to the labor supply for the coming year. A survey in September 1942 of representative farmers indicated that 66 percent of the farmers in New England and 71 percent in the Middle Atlantic States expected to be able to continue or possibly expand their crop and live-stock programs in 1943. The September survey indicated that of the remainder, 34 percent of the farmers in New England and 29 percent in the Middle Atlantic States expected to have to reduce their acreages in crops or the numbers of livestock in 1943 because of anticipated labor shortages. But again, as the season progresses, farmers probably will develop confidence in their ability to meet the labor problems.

(3) The larger commercial farms usually are in a better bargaining position for the available labor supply and have less difficulty obtaining hired workers than do small farms. Many of the smaller farms, however, manage to carry on the farm work with a reduced number of hired workers; the operator works more hours a week and the women and children of the family help more than before. Fuller employment of the family help is particularly effective on dairy and livestock farms where the work-calendar is spread much more uniformly over the year than in the case of farms that produce crops for market.

(4) Farmers and their families made a major contribution to the war last year by putting in more and longer work days than in 1941 in order to reach the production goals of 1942. Reports received from several sources indicate that some operators and family members were working more hours and doing more strenuous work than was advisable from a standpoint of health in order to attain the goals. But apparently more and harder work will be necessary to meet 1943 production goals.

Farmers will have more inexperienced help in 1943 than in 1942; most of the additional workers will be older men, women and youth of school age. A larger number of these workers may be needed to do the same amount of work as was done by the experienced workers they replace. The experience of 1942 suggests that many women and youth are available for farm work. Reports from several sources reveal that many young people indicated a willingness to do farm work but only a small percentage were placed on farms. If this supply of labor is to be effectively used in 1943, placement as well as recruitment should be arranged during this winter and early spring. Transportation, training, and supervision are likewise important features of a program to utilize inexperienced women and youth. Women may already know how or they can learn to milk cows and take care of poultry flocks. With careful instruction boys and girls can learn to drive tractors and operate other machine equipment in addition to the hand tasks they have done in the past.

(5) Some of the experienced farm laborers can do more effective work in 1943 than in 1942. This may be accomplished by working more hours per week, by following improved farm-management practices on the

farm on which they are now working, or by transferring to farms with better soil, livestock, and equipment.

(6) Family workers constituted a larger proportion of the total farm employment in 1942 than in 1941. In the four months, September through December 1942, family workers in New England were 67 percent of the total farm working force compared with 63 percent in the corresponding months for the preceding year. In the Middle Atlantic States the percentage for the same four months in 1942 was 64 percent compared with 63 percent in September to December 1941. The farm working force in 1943 will continue to consist mainly of the operator and his family. The contribution of these family workers may well be larger in 1943 than in 1942.

On September 1, 1942 the percentage of women in the farm-labor force in the Northeast was 12 percent--smaller than the percentage in any other part of the United States except the Mountain and Pacific Coast areas. Similarly, the use of children under 14 years of age in the Northeast was less than in any area except the Pacific Coast States. The percentages of children in farm work in New England and Middle Atlantic States were 6 and 5 respectively, compared with 9 percent for the United States. On the other hand, the percentage of youth 14 to 17 years of age was larger in the Middle Atlantic States (14 percent) than in any other area. The comparable percentage in New England (11 percent) was higher than in most other parts of the United States. Despite the increased participation of women and children under 18 years of age in farm work, the three groups mentioned constituted only about 30 percent of the total force working at least 2 days a week in September 1942.

(7) A farm-labor transportation program was established in 1942 by the United States Department of Agriculture to transport migratory seasonal laborers. It was an attempt to provide the right number of workers at the right place and at the right time. This program was under the supervision of the Farm Security Administration.

(8) Farm wages will continue to rise during 1943. No ceilings have been placed on the wages of agricultural laborers who receive less than \$2,400 a year. A farmer will raise the wages of his help as much as he thinks he can afford in order to hold them. Farm income for New England and the Middle Atlantic States increased 31 percent in the first 10 months of 1942 compared with the same period in 1941. Something of the extent of the rise in wages in 1942 is shown by the following table.

Farm wages

Classification	New England		Middle Atlantic	
	Oct. 1942	Oct. 1941	Oct. 1942	Oct. 1941
	(Dollars)	(Dollars)	(Dollars)	(Dollars)
Per month	:			
With board	:	59.40	:	46.31
Without board	:	89.70	:	72.12
Per day	:		:	
With board	:	3.10	:	2.45
Without board	:	4.06	:	3.39

Higher wages in industry have undoubtedly been the major factor causing farm workers to shift to nonfarm employment. But shorter hours, better working and housing conditions, more regular employment, and organized recruiting by industry have contributed their bit. Agricultural workers with occupational deferment may be reclassified as 1-A subject to immediate call by the Selective Service if they leave farm employment. This policy may reduce some of the competition between industry and agriculture but farm laborers will continue to move from farm to farm if they feel the new job offers them greater opportunities.

A comprehensive appraisal of the agricultural labor situation in any community in the Northeast for 1943 must take into consideration such factors or conditions as:

- (1) The 1942 experience with farm labor.
- (2) Farmers' attitudes toward the farm-labor supply of 1943
- (3) The 1943 production goals.
- (4) Policies of the War Manpower Commission concerning agricultural laborers.
- (5) Farm wages.
- (6) Prices and income received by the farmers for their products.
- (7) Plans for recruiting, placing, and transporting migratory and local laborers.
- (8) Vocational training programs for agricultural workers.
- (9) Rationing of farm machinery.
- (10) Plans for the cooperative use of machinery and equipment and the sharing or swapping of labor among farmers.
- (11) Working and housing conditions of the farm laborers.
- (12) Utilization of farm family labor.

Securing the most effective utilization of total manpower requires careful analysis of these factors, community by community, and area by area. In addition, careful attention will have to be given to ways and means of expanding production on the smaller farms. Increases in

production can be obtained without a corresponding increase in the number of workers needed.

Nature and Scope of Problem of Recruiting and Training Additional Farm Laborers

The farm working force can be classified into family workers and hired laborers, or it can be grouped into regular year-around workers, seasonal workers employed for weeks or months during the planting and harvesting activities, and seasonal laborers hired for a few hours or days during the harvesting of vegetables, fruits, or other crops. The estimates of farm-labor employment are not broken down by this latter classification, but if it is assumed that all persons working during the month that has the smallest working force are year-around workers and that all workers above this number are seasonal workers, then some estimates can be made of the relative importance of the year-around and seasonal workers.

The month in 1942 that had the smallest working force in New England was January when the total farm employment was estimated at 210,000. Much of this year-around work was the caring for livestock and was done by the operator and his family who furnish most (72 percent) of the year-around labor. The peak employment of 313,000 workers occurred in August. The difference of 103,000 indicates the maximum size of the seasonal farm-labor employment. The total farm employment increased 49 percent from the low point in January to the 1942 seasonal high in August.

Only 19 percent of the peak working force was made up of hired year-around workers; 25 percent were hired seasonally, and 56 percent were operators and unpaid members of their families.

Three-fourths of the seasonal laborers were hired; one-fourth were unpaid members of the operator's family who helped with field work during the harvesting or planting of crops. Slightly more than one-half of the hired seasonal help is drawn from nonfarm sources.

The labor situation in the Middle Atlantic States was similar but enough different to justify a separate analysis.

The month in 1942 with the smallest farm working force, in those States, was January when the total farm employment was estimated at 497,000; three-fourths of these were family workers, one-fourth hired hands. The peak employment of 772,000 workers was in July. The maximum size of the seasonal farm labor employment under the assumptions mentioned previously was therefore 275,000. The total farm employment increased 55 percent from the low point in January to the 1942 seasonal high in July.

Fifteen percent of the peak farm employment were hired year-around workers, 24 percent were hired seasonally, and 61 percent were operators and unpaid members of their families.

Two-thirds of the seasonal laborers were hired; one-third were unpaid members of the operators family. Most of the hired seasonal help is obtained from nonfarm sources.

For the New England and Middle Atlantic States the agricultural manpower situation in 1942 can be summarized as follows:

Workers	Middle		
	Atlantic		
	New England	States	Total
	(Thousands)	(Thousands)	(Thousands)
Year-around workers			
Family	151	377	528
Hired	59	120	179
Total	210	497	707
Seasonal workers			
Family	25	91	116
Hired	78	184	262
Total	103	275	378
Peak working force			
Family	176	468	644
Hired	137	304	441
Total	313	772	1,085

Recent estimates by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics indicate that New England had 239,000 persons working on farms December 1, 1942, 8,000 more than in the corresponding month of 1941. The number of hired workers was 10,000 less, but this decrease was more than made up by the 18,00 increase in family workers--the operator and his family.

Estimates from the same source reported the total number of persons working on farms December 1, 1942, in the Middle Atlantic States as 569,000, a decrease of 15,000 from the number reported in the corresponding month of 1941. Approximately 25,000 hired workers left farm employment during this period but an increase of 10,000 family workers lowered the net reduction to 15,000.

The net reduction of total farm employment for the Region, excluding Delaware and Maryland, was 7,000 workers--815,000 on December 1, 1941 to 808,000 on December 1, 1942. Separate figures for Delaware and Maryland are not available. Undoubtedly, the number of workers decreased in these States as in the Middle Atlantic States.

A large portion of the food consumed in the Northeast is produced in the immediate vicinity of, or in production areas adjacent to, industrial-urban centers. This proximity to industrial centers has made the choice between a nearby job in industry and one in agriculture a real possibility for many workers. Northeast farmers have to face stiffer competition for manpower than farmers in many other agricultural

areas. As a result:

- (1) An adequate number of farm laborers is not available from sources that formerly furnished the supply.
- (2) Additional manpower needed to supplement the on-farm labor supply will have to be recruited from nonfarm residents, preferably from nearby groups and from men and women not already engaged in essential wartime employment.
- (3) As most of the new recruits for agriculture will come from groups who are not acquainted with farm operations or the rural environment, both parties, the farmer and the worker, need to have a more definite idea of what is expected of each. This is particularly true if there are to be satisfactory employer-employee relationships. It is equally important that the preparatory instructions and the matching of a worker to a job be done by individuals acquainted with the background and viewpoints of both groups.

This indicates an immediate need for a program of recruiting and training new workers if vacancies are to be filled and trained workers are to be made available to the farmers who need additional help.

Year-Around Workers

Let us consider the program for year-round laborers first. The present policy of the Selective Service is to continue the deferment of essential agricultural workers. Essential workers leaving farm employment may be reclassified as 1-A and subject to immediate call. As most of these workers will not leave agriculture except to enter the armed forces or work in a war industry, deferment alone will not keep these men on the farms. The importance of agriculture in the war needs to be emphasized in several ways, among them:

- (1) War industries and the War Manpower Commission need to stop recruitment of agricultural workers for industrial employment, and
- (2) Farm wages need to be raised.

Moving from one agricultural job to another of equal importance does not affect a worker's draft status and many laborers will shift from farm to farm in an attempt to improve their condition. Under these circumstances the employer who provides the higher wages or better living working conditions will get the better workers.

Individuals who are without an agricultural background, or those who come from agricultural areas that differ markedly from the Northeast,

will need to have a period of practical vocational training. It is, of course, impracticable to attempt to teach potential workers all the skills they will need for a year-around job on farms. But they can be given some appreciation of the nature of farming in the Northeast and a few basic skills in a training course of approximately 3 weeks. Some trainees might be taught how to operate a tractor, others how to milk, etc. The United States Employment Service, Office of Education, and the Farm Security Administration are cooperating in a program that recruits and furnishes transportation, subsistence and instruction to individuals desiring to become farm laborers. The present training centers that are being established will accommodate 20 to 30 persons every 3 or 4 weeks. In order to train the number of workers needed many centers will be required. For example, if the 25,000 hired workers who left farm employment between December 1941 and December 1942 in the Middle Atlantic States had been replaced by individuals trained in centers, approximately 200 such centers would have been needed. By the same standards, 80 such centers would have been required in New England. The number of centers needed to train Delaware and Maryland workers might have brought the total up to about 300.

Probably the number of workers leaving farm employment in 1943 will be less than in 1942 and it will not be necessary to give training to all the new workers. But it would appear that as the manpower situation becomes more critical the need for the program will increase, particularly as women are called upon to replace men. Furthermore, it would be desirable to give seasonal workers some training--perhaps of shorter duration. A training program with a training center in practically every agricultural county is indicated. For this, a farm should be selected as training center, in most counties, and to serve as the nucleus of the recruiting and training program for the county. These local centers could be coordinated with, and could supplement the work of, State agricultural colleges and schools which establish training centers. The colleges and schools could give the more technical training and furnish instructors to the farm training centers.

Seasonal Workers

Some types of farming have additional labor requirements for several weeks or months. For example, dairy farms need additional help for haying, harvesting grain, and silo filling, and it is customary for operators of dairy farms to hire additional workers for 2 to 4 months in the summer. These workers customarily live with the farm family during their employment or they commute from neighboring farms or villages. One of the requirements for such a worker is that he or she be a congenial and wholesome person who may be made a member of the family while employed. Generally, there are frequent and continuing contacts with children in the farm family.

Vegetable and fruit farms have need for crews of workers to harvest crops when they are ready. The beginning of operations, length of time, and size of crew depend on weather conditions as well as quantity to be harvested. It is impossible to forecast these to the last detail.

Frequently, the result is a compromise between need and availability which may not always provide the number and kind of workers that might be desired.

When the supply of laborers was in excess of the demand, the operators could hire all the workers they wanted without any particular difficulty. From the workers' viewpoint the results were unsatisfactory. They seldom had steady work and wages; living and working conditions usually were unsatisfactory. Therefore, the seasonal workers readily shifted to steady jobs when they had a chance.

New sources of supply will have to be tapped this year if an adequate number of seasonal workers are to be available. Farmers need to be assured that laborers will be available for farm operations, particularly for harvesting fruits and vegetables. There is a close relationship between the oversupply of agricultural laborers in the recent past and the current fear of insufficient seasonal labor. These complaints may, or may not be, justified by the facts but they will continue, and they may have an adverse effect upon the acreage planted and the numbers of livestock kept.

Suggestions

Large numbers of inexperienced workers can be used in the harvest crews. They are not made members of the farm family but are housed separately or they may be transported considerable distances from nearby towns and cities. Migratory workers brought in from other areas and housed in labor camps can also be used. If the desired number of seasonal laborers is to be obtained the facilities and efforts of Federal, State, and local organizations, both governmental and voluntary, should be coordinated in planning and executing such a program. As a basis for a program the following lines of action are suggested:

(1) Agricultural agencies responsible for labor and agricultural production should combine their efforts in ascertaining labor requirements by areas, periods of employment, and types of agriculture. This can be done by the agencies meeting around the table and agreeing upon estimates to be used. All the available information should be used in making the estimates but there should be no attempt at getting the figures by complete enumeration.

(2) The crucial need for seasonal workers and the nature of the work to be done should be explained to all groups where workers might be found. The principal groups to be addressed will be students and teachers and women's organizations. In addition, recruiting of individuals should be done through newspapers, radio announcements, and individual contacts. After they have heard the need discussed and farming operations described, individuals should be urged to enroll for farm work. Teachers and others who are accustomed to working with school youth should be urged to enroll as work and camp supervisors in specialized fruit and vegetable areas. This program should be started in areas where the need is most urgent and

extended to other counties as circumstances indicate the advisability of beginning new recruiting and training programs. Recruiting more persons than can be used may bring disappointment and dissatisfaction on the part of the unused recruit who may, as a result, hesitate to contribute his share in later campaigns.

(3) The training program should be expanded and a training center established in most agricultural counties that need laborers. Preparatory training classes should be established for seasonal workers. Physical training could partly condition them for the field work, and discussion of farming operations, working hours, housing conditions, their responsibility for doing a good job, their contribution to the war, could help them to make the adjustment to the rural environment and farm work.

(4) Immediate steps should be taken to match jobs and workers. Where individuals are to spend the summer working on a single farm, arrangements should be completed as early as possible. Where individuals or groups are to be shifted from farm to farm, complete plans should be provided to make these shifts as expeditiously as possible. With a limited number of workers it is important that each make his maximum contribution. Every agricultural office could take orders for workers, enroll potential workers, and assist in matching the two. One agricultural office in each county should be designated as the principal office responsible for farm labor. It should furnish the record forms and keep track of the total placements and unfilled orders.

(5) Plans should be completed for a labor transportation program adequate to handle all the migratory laborers available. Similar plans should be made to transport local seasonal laborers from their homes or from selected centers, to the farms where they are to work. It might be desirable to adapt the guarantee of minimum wages and income that is a part of the farm-labor transportation program for migratory workers to meet the needs of local workers in order to assure an adequate supply of harvest labor. These plans should be flexible enough to expand or contract with the need.

(6)

(6) Plans for camps or living quarters should be made now to house seasonal workers in specialized fruit and vegetable areas. If the camp consists mainly of young people, supervision by persons who are accustomed to deal with youth should be provided. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, for instance, might well work under the supervision of their scoutmasters.

(7) The importance of the production of essential agricultural products should be emphasized. The contribution of farm workers to the war might be recognized by appropriate insignia or uniform.

(8) Workers on farms producing non-essential agricultural products and workers receiving less than the prevailing wage might be considered as available for recruitment and placement on farms that produce essential products and pay prevailing wages, or better.